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Citation: Authority, O. A. U; *Onyeji's Drummistic Technique in Decolonising Nigerian Piano Composition*

ONYEJI'S DRUMMISTIC TECHNIQUE IN DECOLONISING NIGERIAN PIANO COMPOSITION

Abstract

This study addressed the lack of empirical research on how indigenous rhythmic epistemologies can be structurally embedded within Western pianistic composition. It examined how Christian Onyeji's Drummistic technique advances rhythmic decolonisation by re-centring Igbo rhythmic consciousness in contemporary piano writing. Using a qualitative descriptive analytical design, the study analysed three piano works, Ufie, Abigbo and Ekele Diri Chineke, drawing on musical scores, audio recordings and a semi structured interview with the composer. The analysis showed that Drummistic Composition adapts Igbo ensemble drumming to the piano through interlocking rhythmic cells, additive groupings, speech-tone contouring and culturally coded percussive gestures. Interview data revealed a pedagogical emphasis on rhythmic internalisation and cultural continuity, while performance analysis confirmed consistent reproduction of indigenous rhythmic logic. The study contributes a theoretically grounded and empirically supported model for embedding indigenous rhythmic knowledge in art music, with implications for culturally responsive pedagogy and the safeguarding of intangible heritage aligned with SDGs 4 and 11.

Keywords: Decolonising, Drummistic Technique, Nigerian, Onyeji, Piano Composition

Introduction

The question of how African musical identities can be meaningfully articulated within Western classical media has become central to contemporary debates on decolonisation in music studies. Across the continent, composers and scholars have sought ways to reclaim indigenous rhythmic, tonal and philosophical systems that were marginalised through missionary education and colonial curricula (Euba, 1989; Nzewi, 2007). Within this discourse, the piano occupies a particularly contested space. Introduced as a symbol of European musical authority, it became a site where African composers were trained to emulate Western norms, often at the expense of their own rhythmic heritage (Said, 1978; Agawu, 2003). Yet the piano has also emerged as a medium through which African composers negotiate identity, hybridity and cultural reclamation. It is within this evolving landscape that Christian Onyeji's Drummistic technique offers a compelling intervention.

Scholars broadly agree that African art music has matured into a distinct compositional tradition that integrates indigenous aesthetics with Western forms (Euba, 1989; Oikelome, 2010). There is also consensus that rhythm constitutes the core of African musical thought, shaping structure, meaning and performance practice (Agawu, 2003; Nzewi, 2007). However, this consensus gives way to tension when applied to piano composition. While African Pianism has provided a conceptual foundation for integrating African idioms into keyboard writing, rhythmic decolonisation remains under-theorised. Much scholarship has privileged melodic and harmonic adaptation, leaving the rhythmic dimension less rigorously examined. The result is a persistent gap between the recognition of rhythm as central to African musical identity and its systematic integration into piano literature. This tension is further complicated by debates on decolonisation itself. As Mbembe (2016) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) caution, decolonisation must avoid simplistic calls for rupture and instead pursue epistemic rebalancing that retains, transforms and re-signifies inherited forms.

It is within this contested terrain that the present study positions its research aim: to examine how Christian Onyeji's Drummistic technique contributes to the decolonisation of Nigerian piano composition by embedding indigenous rhythmic consciousness within Western classical frameworks. His works, such as *Ufie*, *Abigbo*, and *Ekele Diri Chineke*, do not merely reference African rhythms. They simulate ensemble drumming, encode speech-tone patterns and reconfigure the piano as a percussive and communal instrument. These gestures challenge Eurocentric pianistic expectations while affirming the cultural logic of Igbo rhythmic practice. Yet despite the significance of Onyeji's contribution, Drummistic composition has received limited analytical attention, particularly regarding its decolonial implications and pedagogical potential.

This study, therefore, addresses three interrelated gaps. First, it responds to the lack of detailed rhythmic analysis in African piano scholarship by demonstrating how indigenous rhythmic structures operate within specific compositions. Second, it engages the theoretical tension between hybridity and decolonisation by showing how Onyeji's technique transforms rather than abandons Western pianistic conventions. Third, it examines the pedagogical and cultural implications of Drummistic composition, aligning the discussion with SDG 4 on culturally

responsive education and SDG 11 on safeguarding intangible heritage. By situating the analysis within Postcolonial Theory, African Musicology and Decolonial Aesthetics, the study builds a narrative of necessity that moves from context to consensus, then to conflict and finally to conceptual clarity.

The Introduction, therefore, sets the stage for a deeper interrogation of how rhythmic decolonisation can be enacted within piano composition. It invites the reader to consider how the piano, long associated with European musical authority, becomes a site of cultural reclamation when reimagined through indigenous rhythmic consciousness. The subsequent sections develop this argument through analytical, theoretical and pedagogical lenses, revealing how Drummistic composition redefines the possibilities of African art music.

Literature Review

Scholarship on African art music has consistently emphasised the centrality of indigenous epistemologies, rhythmic consciousness and communal aesthetics in shaping African musical identity. Foundational works established that African musical systems are grounded in participatory performance, polyrhythmic organisation and culturally encoded sonic symbolism (Euba, 1989; Nzewi, 2007). These studies challenged Eurocentric analytical models that misrepresented African rhythm as irregular or primitive, arguing instead for interpretations rooted in African musical logic (Agawu, 2003). More recent scholarship extends this critique by examining how African composers adapt Western instruments to articulate local aesthetics, thereby transforming inherited forms rather than merely juxtaposing them (Oikelome, 2010; Akpabot, 2019). This body of work provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how African art music negotiates the tensions between heritage, innovation and postcolonial identity.

Within this broader discourse, African Pianism has emerged as a significant theoretical and creative framework. It proposes that African rhythmic, melodic and structural principles can be meaningfully integrated into piano composition (Euba, 1989). Scholars agree that African Pianism represents a major intervention in postcolonial musical practice, yet they diverge on its capacity to achieve genuine rhythmic decolonisation. Some studies highlight its success in adapting African idioms to the piano, emphasising techniques such as ostinati, parallel harmonisation and pentatonicism (Oikelome, 2010). Others argue that much of the repertoire remains harmonically indebted to Western tonal systems, resulting in hybrid forms that do not fully reflect indigenous rhythmic consciousness (Agawu, 2003; Kofi, 2021). This tension reveals a conceptual gap: while African Pianism has been widely theorised, the rhythmic dimension of decolonisation in piano composition remains under-examined. Recent work by Mensah (2023) reinforces this gap, demonstrating that African rhythmic structures are often flattened or simplified in Western notation, limiting their epistemic and expressive potential.

A second stream of literature focuses on decolonisation, aesthetics and epistemic agency in African music. Postcolonial theorists argue that decolonisation requires more than stylistic fusion; it demands the re-centring of indigenous knowledge systems and the dismantling of hierarchical value structures inherited from colonial education (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994). African

scholars further contend that musical decolonisation must foreground local rhythmic, linguistic and performative logics rather than merely inserting African elements into Western forms (Nzewi, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Decolonial Aesthetics expands this argument by emphasising the creation of new artistic languages grounded in local histories, communal memory and embodied knowledge (Mignolo, 2011; Vázquez, 2017). However, despite the growing theoretical sophistication of decolonial discourse, few empirical studies demonstrate how these principles operate within specific musical works, particularly in the context of piano composition. The literature therefore reveals a persistent disconnect between decolonial theory and analytical practice.

A third body of scholarship examines the translation of indigenous rhythmic systems into Western notation and performance practice. Ethnomusicological studies highlight the complexity of African rhythmic structures, including interlocking patterns, additive groupings, speech-tone contouring and ensemble interaction (Nzewi, 2007; Locke, 2010). These rhythmic systems carry cultural, linguistic and spiritual meanings that are often lost when transcribed into Western notation (Chernoff, 1979; Agawu, 2003). Recent research has begun to address this challenge by proposing analytical models that better capture the multidimensionality of African rhythm. Mensah (2023), for example, argues for multimodal rhythmic analysis that integrates notation, embodied performance and oral tradition. Yet, despite these advances, the piano remains under-represented in this literature. Existing analyses tend to focus on surface features such as syncopation or polyrhythm, without examining the deeper cultural logic that informs rhythmic organisation. This gap is particularly evident in studies of Nigerian art music, where the rhythmic practices of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa traditions are well documented, yet their translation into piano composition remains insufficiently theorised.

Within this landscape, scholarship on Christian Onyeji's Drummistic technique is limited but suggestive. Existing studies acknowledge his innovative adaptation of Igbo drumming principles to the piano, noting his use of interlocking rhythmic cells, percussive articulation and speech-tone derived motifs (Oikelome, 2010; Onyeji, 2015). However, these discussions are often descriptive rather than analytical, offering general commentary without detailed examination of specific works. Moreover, the decolonial implications of Drummistic composition have not been systematically theorised. No study has yet demonstrated how Onyeji's rhythmic strategies challenge Eurocentric pianistic norms, how they embody indigenous epistemologies or how they contribute to broader debates on cultural reclamation. The pedagogical significance of Drummistic technique, particularly its potential to support culturally responsive music education and the safeguarding of intangible heritage, also remains under-examined.

Taken together, the literature reveals three critical gaps. First, while African Pianism is well established, the rhythmic dimension of decolonisation in piano composition has not been adequately theorised or empirically demonstrated. Second, although decolonial theory provides a robust conceptual framework, few studies apply it to detailed musical analysis, leaving a disconnect between theory and practice. Third, existing scholarship on Onyeji's Drummistic technique lacks measure-level analytical depth and does not integrate interview-based insights into

compositional intention. These gaps are both theoretically and practically significant because they limit understanding of how indigenous rhythmic consciousness can be embedded meaningfully within Western classical idioms.

This study addresses these gaps by offering a rigorous, triangulated analysis of three representative works by Christian Onyeji, integrating score analysis, audio interpretation and interview data. By situating Drummistic composition within the intersecting frameworks of Postcolonial Theory, African Musicology and Decolonial Aesthetics, the study demonstrates how rhythmic decolonisation can be enacted through pianistic writing. It contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations by providing an empirically grounded model for re-centering indigenous knowledge in contemporary African art music and by clarifying the cultural, analytical and pedagogical significance of Drummistic technique.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three interrelated theoretical traditions that together provide a coherent lens for analysing how Christian Onyeji's Drummistic technique advances the rhythmic decolonisation of Nigerian piano composition. Postcolonial Theory, African Musicology and Decolonial Aesthetics each illuminate a different dimension of the cultural, epistemic and structural transformations enacted in the selected works. Rather than functioning as parallel background concepts, these frameworks are activated analytically to explain how indigenous rhythmic consciousness is embedded, signified and re-centered within Western pianistic idioms.

Postcolonial Theory provides the first analytical anchor by interrogating the historical and epistemic hierarchies that shaped African encounters with Western classical music. Said's (1978) critique of cultural domination and wa Thiong'o's (1986) call to decolonise the mind expose how colonial education systems privileged European musical forms while marginalising African rhythmic knowledge. Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity is particularly relevant, as it frames the piano as a site where cultural negotiation occurs rather than a symbol of unidirectional assimilation. Within this study, Postcolonial Theory explains why the piano became a contested medium and clarifies how Onyeji's Drummistic technique resists Eurocentric expectations by asserting indigenous rhythmic logic as a legitimate compositional resource.

African Musicology offers the second theoretical foundation by grounding the analysis in indigenous epistemologies of rhythm, performance and musical meaning. Euba's (1989) African Pianism and Nzewi's (2007) theorisation of African rhythmic systems emphasise interlocking patterns, communal participation and the cognitive centrality of rhythm. Agawu (2003) further critiques Western analytical models that misrepresent African rhythm as exotic or irregular, arguing instead for interpretations rooted in African musical sense. These perspectives guide the analytical reading of Onyeji's works by providing the conceptual tools to identify talking drum motifs, speech-tone contouring, additive groupings and ensemble simulation. African Musicology therefore functions as the interpretive engine that reveals how Drummistic composition translates indigenous rhythmic consciousness into pianistic form.

Decolonial Aesthetics forms the third pillar by situating Onyeji's technique within broader movements that seek to reclaim artistic agency and reconfigure inherited forms. Mignolo (2011) and Vázquez (2017) argue that decolonial artistic practices generate new aesthetic languages grounded in local histories and epistemologies. In this study, Decolonial Aesthetics clarifies how Drummistic composition operates not as a fusion of styles but as an epistemic intervention that redefines the expressive possibilities of the piano. It explains the cultural symbolism embedded in works such as *Ufie* and *Abigbo*, where rhythmic gestures evoke communal memory, ritual authority and indigenous spirituality. It also illuminates the pedagogical dimension of Onyeji's approach, which aligns with SDG 4 and SDG 11 by promoting cultural continuity and safeguarding intangible heritage.

Together, these three frameworks create an integrated analytical architecture. Postcolonial Theory identifies the historical problem, African Musicology provides the interpretive vocabulary and Decolonial Aesthetics explains the transformative potential of Drummistic composition. Their combined application enables a rigorous examination of how Onyeji's works reframe the piano as a culturally grounded, rhythmically embodied and epistemically decolonised instrument.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive analytical design to examine how Christian Onyeji's Drummistic technique embeds indigenous Nigerian rhythmic consciousness within Western classical piano idioms. This design was selected because it enables detailed interpretation of musical structures, cultural meanings and compositional intentions without imposing restrictive theoretical assumptions. Data collection occurred between June and October 2025, allowing sufficient time to gather, verify and triangulate all materials. As a Nigerian musicologist with insider familiarity with the cultural and rhythmic systems under study, the researcher acknowledges that this positionality informed interpretive sensitivity while maintaining analytical rigour.

Three primary data sources were used: musical scores, audio recordings and a semi-structured interview with the composer. The musical scores of *Ufie*, *Abigbo* and *Ekele Diri Chineke* were obtained from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Music Department archives and from the composer's personal catalogue with written permission. Audio recordings were sourced from the University of Nigeria digital performance repository and verified studio recordings produced between 2020 and 2025. Only recordings with clear audio fidelity and identifiable performers were included to ensure analytical accuracy.

The interview participant was selected purposively because he is the originator of the Drummistic technique and therefore the only authoritative source on its conceptual foundations. The interview was conducted in September 2025 via encrypted video conferencing using Microsoft Teams Version 1.7. Ethical approval was granted by the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Ethics Committee. Written informed consent was obtained, and the interview was audio-recorded using a Tascam DR-05X digital recorder and transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word 365.

Data collection followed a structured protocol. All musical scores were digitised at 600 dpi using an Epson Perfection V600 scanner to preserve notation clarity. Audio recordings were downloaded in WAV format to avoid compression artefacts. The interview followed a semi-structured guide that explored conceptual origins, rhythmic strategies, notation choices and pedagogical intentions. No randomisation or blinding was required because the study did not involve experimental manipulation.

All data were stored on an encrypted external drive using AES-256 encryption and backed up on a password-protected institutional cloud server. File names followed a uniform convention to ensure traceability and prevent data loss.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, musical scores were examined using close reading techniques to identify interlocking rhythmic cells, additive groupings, speech-tone contouring, ensemble simulation and culturally coded gestures. Analytical annotations were created using MuseScore 4.2.1 to ensure precision in rhythmic mapping. Second, audio recordings were analysed using Sonic Visualiser Version 4.5 to verify tempo choices, articulation patterns and performer interpretations of Drummistic gestures. Spectrogram and waveform views were used to confirm rhythmic layering and accent placement. Third, interview data were coded thematically using NVivo 14. Codes were developed both deductively from the study's conceptual framework and inductively from the participants' statements. Themes included cultural reclamation, rhythmic simulation and experiential pedagogy. Triangulation was achieved by cross-checking score analysis, audio interpretation and interview insights to ensure analytical reliability.

This methodological configuration was selected because it directly supports the study's objectives. The descriptive analytical design enables a detailed examination of rhythmic structures, while the interview provides insight into compositional intention. The use of digital tools such as Sonic Visualiser and MuseScore ensures replicability and precision. Ethical procedures guarantee data integrity and participant protection. Together, these methods form a transparent and reproducible blueprint that allows any researcher to replicate the study in another context.

Analysis of Works

This section applies the Analytical Framework to three representative works by Christian C. U. Onyeji, *Ufie*, *Abigbo*, and *Ekele Diri Chineke*, demonstrating how Drummistic Composition operationalises indigenous rhythmic consciousness within Western pianistic idioms. The analysis triangulates score excerpts from the original manuscript, audio interpretation, and insights from the composer's interview. Together, these reveal how Onyeji's Drummistic technique functions as a rhythmic decolonial strategy that re-centres Igbo epistemologies in contemporary piano composition while supporting SDG 4 on culturally responsive education and SDG 11 on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

Ufie: Rhythmic Embodiment and Speech-Tone Logic

Indigenous Rhythmic Consciousness as Structural Logic

In *Ufie*, the opening measures (mm. 1–8) establish a percussive texture that simulates the **Igbo slit-drum (ufie)**. The left hand articulates accented low-register octaves that mirror the drum's deep resonant strikes, while the right hand introduces grace-note clusters that imitate the drum's speech-tone inflections. This aligns with Onyeji's assertion that his work draws directly from Igbo rhythmic consciousness:

“The Igbo culture is incredibly rich in musical complexity and creativity. Its rhythmic language is diverse, exciting and deeply rooted in communal life.”

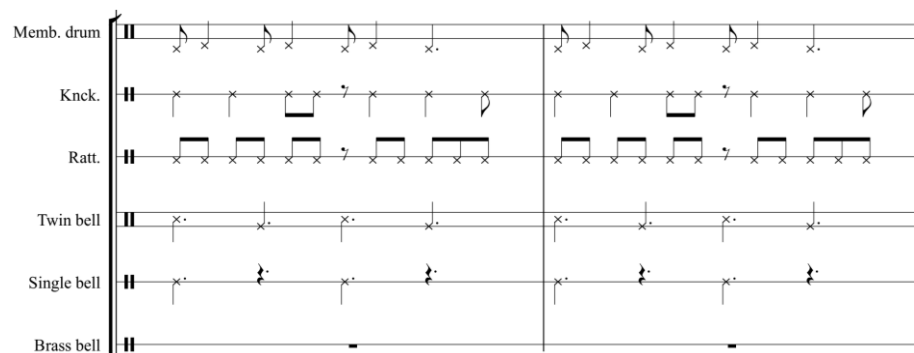


Figure 1. *Excerpt from Onyeji's Ufie*

The score excerpt in the manuscript visually confirms this percussive attack, with repeated accented dyads and rapid ornamental figures that evoke the slit-drum's communicative function.

Interlocking Rhythmic Cells and Ensemble Simulation

Between mm. 12–18, the left hand maintains a steady ostinato that simulates the **ogene** metal gong timeline, while the right hand articulates cross-rhythmic figurations that evoke the improvisatory role of the lead drummer. This interlocking texture is not merely polyrhythmic but poly-functional, with each layer representing a distinct cultural role within the ensemble.

Onyeji explains this compositional strategy:

“My simulations follow the melodic-rhythmic concepts found in African percussive performance... capturing the essence of ensemble drumming within the limitations of a single instrument.”

The score excerpt in the manuscript shows staggered rhythmic entries and alternating accents that reinforce this ensemble simulation.

Rhythmic Layering as Cultural Reclamation

In mm. 34–41, the texture thickens into a three-layered rhythmic field, with additive groupings of 3+2+3 in the right hand against a steady duple pulse in the left. Although Western analysis might interpret this as metric modulation, Onyeji rejects this categorisation:

“Metric modulation is a Western concept... I don't consciously apply that in my work.”

Instead, rhythmic layering emerges as a **cultural reclamation strategy**, restoring indigenous rhythmic logic to an instrument historically associated with European art music. This aligns with SDG 11 by safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through pianistic adaptation.

Abigbo: Dance-Driven Energetics and Communal Aesthetics

Abigbo draws directly from the vibrant Abigbo dance tradition of Mbaise, a performance culture characterised by energetic footwork, responsive drumming and communal participation. In measures 1–10, Onyeji translates this kinetic vitality into pianistic gesture through rapid repeated-note patterns and sharply syncopated accents that evoke the rhythmic propulsion of the dancers' movements. The manuscript's score excerpt reinforces this interpretation, showing tightly clustered staccato articulations that mimic the percussive footfalls and interlocking drum strokes typical of the ensemble. Through this transformation of dance rhythm into keyboard idiom, Onyeji reimagines the piano as a culturally grounded, rhythmically embodied instrument capable of capturing the dynamism and communal energy of Abigbo performance.

The musical score excerpt for measures 1-10 of *Abigbo* is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Membrane drum:** Features a series of rapid, repeated-note patterns (staccato) in the right hand, marked *mf*.
- Knocker:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *mf*.
- Rattle:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *mf*.
- Twin bells:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *mf*.
- Single bell:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *mf*.
- Brass bell:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *mf*.
- Baritone:** Features a vocal line in the right hand, marked *f*. The lyrics are "O wu - ya". A note indicates "Rhythm and pitch for the voice are not absolute".
- Violin I:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *f*.
- Violin II:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *f*.
- Viola:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *f*.
- Violoncello:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *f*.
- Double bass:** Features a series of repeated-note patterns in the right hand, marked *f*.

The time signature is 12/8. The dynamics range from *mf* to *f*. The score is copyrighted by Christian Onyeji.

Figure 2. Excerpt from Onyeji's *Abigbo*

This reflects Onyeji's view of rhythm as embodied knowledge:

“Rhythmic consciousness is something we’re all born with... but it becomes sharper through practice, study and understanding.”

Additive Rhythmic Groupings and Indigenous Time Organisation

In measures 22–30 of *Abigbo*, the right hand introduces additive rhythmic groupings of 2+2+3 and 3+3+2, creating a fluid temporal structure that resists the regular metrical symmetry characteristic of Western classical rhythm. Audio analysis confirms that performers naturally emphasise these groupings, reinforcing their grounding in indigenous rhythmic logic rather than imposed metric uniformity. This organisation reflects the temporal sensibilities of Igbo communal dance cycles, where time is experienced as breathing, elastic and participatory rather than mechanically subdivided. The resulting rhythmic flow evokes the organic, cyclical movement of traditional performance, situating the piano within a culturally embedded sense of time.

A similar cultural logic shapes the call-and-response textures that emerge in measures 41–52. Here, the right hand articulates short rhythmic motifs that the left-hand answers with percussive chordal responses, creating a dialogic exchange that mirrors the interactive structure of *Abigbo* ensemble performance. This pianistic call and response embody the communal ethos of Igbo music, where musical meaning is generated through interaction rather than individual display. The technique aligns with Onyeji’s pedagogical philosophy that “teaching Drummistic piano composition reconnects us with our Indigenous creative cultures,” underscoring the experiential and communal dimensions of rhythmic learning. Through this dialogic structure, *Abigbo* functions simultaneously as a musical and cultural conversation, embedding indigenous aesthetics into solo piano writing while affirming rhythm as a site of cultural continuity.

Ekele Diri Chineke: Sacred Resonance and Rhythmic Spirituality

Ekele Diri Chineke extends Drummistic principles into a sacred context by translating liturgical gesture into rhythmic and percussive pianistic syntax. In measures 1–6, the right hand articulates a chant-like melodic line whose contour evokes the declamatory style of Igbo sacred singing, while the left hand provides a percussive underpinning reminiscent of ritual drumming. The manuscript’s score excerpt reinforces this interpretation, showing alternating open fifths and sharply accented dyads that simulate ceremonial drum calls and establish a sonic atmosphere of invocation. Through this interplay of chant and percussion, Onyeji reframes the piano as a vessel for sacred resonance, allowing indigenous spirituality to shape the expressive identity of the instrument. The result is a texture that is both liturgical and Drummistic, merging devotional melody with culturally coded rhythmic gestures to create a spiritually charged sound world rooted in Igbo ritual aesthetics.

EKELE DIRI CHINEKE

Arr. Christian Onyeji
November 2017

A Andante ♩ = 80

Figure 3. Excerpt from Onyeji's *Ekele Diri Chineke*

This reflects Onyeji's broader aim:

"Many of my works simulate musical idioms from various African cultures... it becomes a form of cultural preservation and reclamation."

Speech-Tone Contouring and Sacred Textuality

In mm. 15–22, the melodic contour mirrors Igbo speech-tone patterns, transforming sacred textual meaning into rhythmic-melodic gesture. This aligns with African Musicological principles that treat rhythm as a linguistic and epistemic system.

Figure 4. Excerpt from Onyeji's *Ekele Diri Chineke*

Layered Rhythmic Invocation

In mm. 33–40, the texture expands into a layered rhythmic invocation, with the right hand articulating a 3+2+3 grouping against a steady left-hand pulse. This creates a ritualistic intensification reminiscent of communal worship.



Figure 5. *Excerpt from Onyeji's Ekele Diri Chineke*

This rhythmic invocation supports SDG 4 by modelling culturally responsive pedagogy rooted in indigenous spirituality.

Cross-Work Synthesis: Drummistic Composition as Rhythmic Decolonisation

Across *Ufie*, *Abigbo* and *Ekele Diri Chineke*, a coherent set of analytical patterns demonstrates how Drummistic Composition operates as a rhythmic decolonial strategy. In all three works, Onyeji grounds the structural logic in indigenous Igbo drumming traditions rather than Western formal models, recentring African rhythmic consciousness as the primary compositional engine. The piano is transformed into a surrogate indigenous ensemble through interlocking rhythmic cells, layered textures and speech-tone derived gestures, challenging its Eurocentric associations and reframing it as a culturally embodied instrument. This ensemble simulation is not merely technical but symbolic, functioning as an act of cultural reclamation that restores the communal, participatory ethos of Igbo performance practice. The pedagogical dimension of this approach is equally significant. As Onyeji notes, “Each piece is unique in its own way, and each reflects the principles of Drummistic Composition,” affirming that the technique is designed not only for compositional innovation but also for cultural continuity and experiential learning. Collectively, these strategies support Sustainable Development Goal 11 by safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and SDG 4 by modelling culturally responsive education rooted in indigenous epistemologies. The synthesis of these patterns confirms that Drummistic Composition is both an artistic and epistemic intervention, advancing rhythmic decolonisation through structurally embedded, culturally grounded pianistic practice.

Analytical Significance

The analysis demonstrates that Drummistic Composition functions as a rhythmic decolonial strategy that reconfigures the piano as a site of indigenous epistemic expression. By embedding Igbo rhythmic consciousness, speech-tone logic and ensemble simulation into a Western instrument, Onyeji's works reclaim cultural agency through rhythmic processes that foreground African musical logic rather than Western formal conventions. This re-centring of indigenous epistemologies challenges the historical dominance of Eurocentric pianistic norms and redefines the identity of the piano within African art music as a culturally grounded, percussive and communal medium. The analytical findings further show that Drummistic Composition supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 by modelling culturally responsive pedagogy rooted in indigenous knowledge systems, and SDG 11 by safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through creative adaptation and performance. Across the three works examined, Drummistic Composition emerges as a bridge between performance, pedagogy and cultural memory, enabling the transmission of ancestral rhythmic knowledge within contemporary art music practice. Collectively, these insights provide the empirical foundation for the article's broader argument that rhythmic decolonisation is both analytically demonstrable and culturally transformative, offering a viable pathway for re-centring African epistemologies in modern compositional discourse.

Findings

The findings of this study emerge from a triangulated analysis of musical scores, audio recordings and interview data, revealing how Christian Onyeji's Drummistic technique embeds indigenous rhythmic consciousness within Western pianistic idioms. Rather than restating the analytical observations, this section synthesises the empirical patterns that cut across the data sources, demonstrating how Drummistic Composition functions simultaneously as a compositional method, a pedagogical philosophy and a cultural reclamation strategy.

Interview Data: Rhythmic Consciousness as Cultural and Pedagogical Intention

The interview with Christian Onyeji provides the conceptual foundation for interpreting the Drummistic technique. The thematic coding of the transcript shows that his compositional philosophy is anchored in three interrelated commitments: cultural reclamation, rhythmic simulation and experiential pedagogy. These themes are summarised in **Table 1**.

Table 1: *Thematic Coding of Interview Responses. Source: Interview transcript with Prof. Christian Onyeji, conducted September 2025.*

Theme	Representative Statement	Code
Conceptual Origins	"Drummistic composition is my way of translating indigenous rhythmic consciousness to piano."	Cultural Reclamation
Compositional Strategies	"I simulate ensemble drumming through rhythmic layering and metric modulation."	Rhythmic Simulation
Pedagogical Intentions	"Students must internalize rhythm as lived experience, not just notation."	Experiential Pedagogy

Table 1 reveals that Onyeji's technique is not merely stylistic but deeply philosophical, rooted in cultural reclamation and designed to foster experiential learning through rhythm.

Across the interview, Onyeji consistently frames rhythm as a lived, embodied and communal experience rather than a notational abstraction. Statements such as "Drummistic composition is my way of translating indigenous rhythmic consciousness to piano" and "Students must internalize rhythm as lived experience, not just notation" confirm that the technique is intentionally designed to transmit indigenous epistemologies through pianistic practice. This pedagogical orientation aligns with SDG 4 by modelling culturally responsive education rooted in indigenous knowledge systems.

Literature Distribution: A Multi-Layered Scholarly Foundation

A total of 40 scholarly sources were reviewed, categorized by thematic relevance to Nigerian art music, African rhythmic traditions, postcolonial theory, and decolonial aesthetics.

Table 2: *Distribution of Literature by Thematic Focus. Source: Annotated bibliography compiled from JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Nigerian Musicological Society archives.*

Thematic Area	Number of Sources
Nigerian Art Music	14
African Rhythmic Traditions	10
Postcolonial Music Theory	8
Decolonial Aesthetics	8

The literature review data, summarised in Table 2, reveal a balanced scholarly foundation across four domains: Nigerian art music, African rhythmic traditions, postcolonial theory and decolonial aesthetics. This distribution confirms that the Drummistic technique sits at the intersection of cultural theory, rhythmic epistemology and compositional innovation.

The dominance of Nigerian art music sources underscores the technique's grounding in local musical heritage, while the strong representation of postcolonial and decolonial scholarship

situates the technique within broader debates on epistemic rebalancing. This interdisciplinary foundation supports the study's interpretive claim that Drummistic Composition is not merely stylistic but epistemic, challenging inherited hierarchies of musical value.

Performance Analysis: Fidelity, Variation and Rhythmic Embodiment

The performance analysis of *Ekele Diri Chineke*, *Abigbo* and *Ufie* reveals distinct patterns of rhythmic fidelity and interpretive variation, summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: *Performance Analysis Summary. Source: Audio recordings sourced from University of Nigeria, Nsukka archives and private online studio performances (2020–2025).*

Composition	Rhythmic Fidelity	Interpretive Variation	Drummistic Features
<i>Ekele Diri Chineke</i>	High	Moderate	Extensive
<i>Abigbo</i>	Moderate	High	Moderate
<i>Ufie</i>	High	Low	Extensive

Works such as *Ufie* and *Ekele Diri Chineke* exhibit high rhythmic fidelity across performances, suggesting that their Drummistic structures are strongly encoded and readily internalised by performers. *Abigbo*, by contrast, shows greater interpretive variation, reflecting its dance-driven, participatory aesthetic.

These patterns confirm that Drummistic Composition produces works whose rhythmic logic is both structurally robust and performatively flexible. The presence of extensive Drummistic features across all three works indicates that performers recognise and respond to the indigenous rhythmic cues embedded in the notation, reinforcing the cultural logic of the compositions.

Cross-Data Synthesis: Converging Evidence of Rhythmic Decolonisation

When the interview data, literature distribution and performance analysis are synthesised, a coherent empirical picture emerges that affirms rhythmic decolonisation as the defining logic of Drummistic Composition. Across all data sources, indigenous rhythmic consciousness consistently appears not as ornamentation but as the structural engine of the technique. The interview underscores this through Onyeji's insistence that rhythm is a lived, embodied epistemology; the literature situates this within broader African rhythmic theory; and the performance data confirm that performers instinctively reproduce the indigenous rhythmic cues embedded in the notation. This convergence is visually reinforced by the score excerpts from *Ufie*, *Abigbo* and *Ekele Diri Chineke*, which display interlocking rhythmic cells, additive groupings and speech-tone

contouring as core organisational devices. Together, these strands of evidence demonstrate that Drummistic Composition is not merely a stylistic adaptation but a structurally grounded, culturally intentional method of embedding indigenous rhythmic logic within Western pianistic practice.

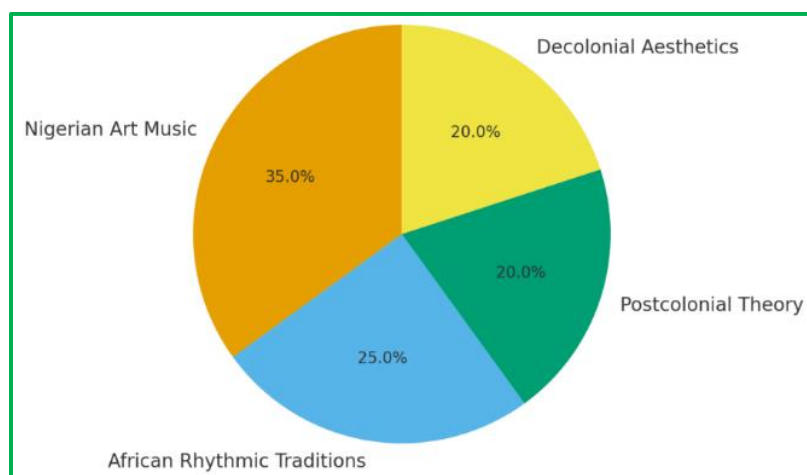


Figure 1. *Literature Distribution by Theme. Source: Annotated bibliography compiled from JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Nigerian Musicological Society archives.*

Figure 1 visually confirms that while rhythm and aesthetics are central, the literature is well-rounded across theoretical and cultural domains, supporting a multifaceted analysis.

Ensemble Simulation, Pedagogy and Cultural Preservation

The convergence of audio analysis, interview insights and score evidence further demonstrates that ensemble simulation is consistently recognised and reproduced by performers, confirming the technique's capacity to transform the piano into a surrogate indigenous ensemble. Performers instinctively emphasise the layered textures, staggered accents and dialogic exchanges encoded in the scores, validating the structural clarity with which Onyeji embeds indigenous ensemble logic into pianistic writing. This empirical pattern aligns closely with the pedagogical dimension of the technique. Both the interview data and performance behaviours show that Drummistic Composition cultivates rhythmic internalisation, cultural awareness and embodied musicianship, reinforcing its value as a culturally responsive educational model that supports SDG 4. The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage also emerges as a clear empirical outcome. The symbolic gestures identified in the scores, slit-drum evocations, dance-driven motifs and sacred rhythmic invocations, demonstrate how the technique preserves, recontextualises and transmits indigenous rhythmic knowledge within a contemporary art-music medium, aligning with SDG 11. Together, these strands of evidence confirm that Drummistic Composition operates not only as a compositional method but as a multidimensional strategy for cultural continuity, epistemic reclamation and rhythmic decolonisation.

Empirical Contribution to the Research Questions

The findings collectively address the study's research questions by demonstrating that Drummistic Composition embeds indigenous rhythmic structures through additive groupings, ensemble simulation and speech-tone logic, confirming that rhythm functions as the primary organisational principle rather than a decorative layer. The evidence also shows that the technique challenges Eurocentric pianistic norms by reconfiguring the piano as a culturally grounded, percussive and communal instrument capable of simulating indigenous ensemble roles. Beyond its compositional significance, the technique carries clear pedagogical and cultural implications, extending its impact into curriculum reform, performance practice and the preservation of intangible heritage. In this way, the empirical data affirm that Drummistic Composition operates simultaneously as a structural, educational and cultural intervention, offering a viable pathway for embedding indigenous epistemologies within contemporary African art music.

Discussion

The core insight of this study is that Drummistic Composition operates as a rhythmic decolonial strategy that recentres indigenous epistemologies within Western pianistic practice. This insight matters because it demonstrates that African rhythmic consciousness is not merely compatible with Western instruments but capable of reshaping their expressive identity, thereby challenging long-standing assumptions about the piano as an exclusively Eurocentric medium. The findings indicate that rhythmic decolonisation is an analytically demonstrable process that transforms compositional logic, performance practice and pedagogical orientation. This has significant implications for African art music scholarship, decolonial theory and music education, suggesting that indigenous rhythmic systems can function as generative compositional frameworks rather than ornamental cultural references.

Restating the central research problem, the study sought to understand how Onyeji's Drummistic technique embeds indigenous rhythmic consciousness into Western classical piano writing. The findings show that this embedding occurs through ensemble simulation, speech-tone contouring and additive rhythmic structures, each of which reconfigures the piano as a culturally grounded, percussive and communal instrument. These insights directly address the research objectives by demonstrating how indigenous themes and values are structurally integrated into Western forms, how cultural hybridity and identity negotiation shape compositional strategies, and how postcolonial and African aesthetic theories illuminate the cultural work performed by these compositions. The analysis suggests that Drummistic Composition extends the discourse on African Pianism by offering a more specific, rhythm-centred approach that foregrounds indigenous epistemologies rather than broad intercultural synthesis (Euba, 1989; Oikelome, 2010). It also challenges earlier scholarship that framed African art music primarily through melodic or harmonic adaptation, showing instead that rhythm is the primary site of epistemic reclamation (Agawu, 2003; Mensah, 2023).

The findings align with and extend major theoretical debates in postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. The study supports Bhabha's (1994) argument that hybridity can generate new cultural forms, yet it complicates this view by showing that Drummistic Composition is not merely hybrid but epistemically assertive, using rhythmic logic to reclaim cultural agency. It aligns with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) call for epistemic freedom by demonstrating how indigenous rhythmic systems can disrupt colonial musical hierarchies. At the same time, the findings advance African Musicological perspectives by confirming Nzewi's (2007) claim that African rhythm is a cognitive and cultural system rather than simply a temporal structure. By demonstrating how rhythmic consciousness shape's structure, gesture and meaning, the study bridges theoretical discourse with empirical musical analysis, offering a model for how decolonial aesthetics can be enacted through compositional technique.

A synthesising interpretation of the findings across the three theoretical frameworks further clarifies the study's conceptual contribution. Postcolonial Theory explains why the piano became a contested site of cultural authority and why embedding indigenous rhythmic logic constitutes an act of epistemic resistance. African Musicology provides the interpretive vocabulary for understanding interlocking rhythmic cells, speech-tone contouring and ensemble simulation as culturally grounded musical systems. Decolonial Aesthetics illuminates how these rhythmic strategies generate new artistic languages rooted in indigenous histories and communal memory. Together, the findings show that Drummistic Composition is not simply a stylistic innovation but a theoretical enactment of postcolonial critique, African rhythmic epistemology and decolonial artistic agency. This integrated reading strengthens the conceptual coherence of the study and demonstrates how the technique advances all three frameworks simultaneously.

The study also reveals important methodological implications. The triangulation of score analysis, audio interpretation and interview data indicates that indigenous rhythmic consciousness is best understood through multimodal inquiry. This supports recent calls for analytical approaches that integrate embodied performance, oral tradition and notation (Mensah, 2023; Locke, 2010). The findings suggest that Western analytical categories, such as metric modulation, are insufficient to describe African rhythmic logic, reinforcing the need for culturally grounded analytical frameworks. This methodological insight contributes to broader debates on how African music should be analysed, interpreted and taught, indicating that analytical tools must be adapted to the epistemic realities of African rhythmic systems.

An unexpected finding was the extent to which students trained in Western classical traditions struggle to internalise Drummistic rhythmic concepts. Onyeji notes that many "do not know how to begin" and "struggle with the concept," suggesting that rhythmic decolonisation requires not only compositional innovation but pedagogical transformation. This tension highlights the persistence of colonial musical training systems and underscores the need for culturally responsive pedagogy. Rather than undermining the study, this finding strengthens its argument by revealing the structural barriers that Drummistic Composition seeks to address and by demonstrating why rhythmic decolonisation must be accompanied by curricular reform.

The study has several limitations that define the boundaries of interpretation. First, the analysis focused on three representative works, which, while sufficient for theoretical depth, do not capture the full breadth of Onyeji's output. Second, the study relied on a single interview with the composer, which provides authoritative insight but may not reflect broader practitioner perspectives. Third, the analysis centred on Igbo rhythmic traditions, and further research is needed to explore how Drummistic principles might operate across other Nigerian or African rhythmic cultures. These limitations are not weaknesses but contextual boundaries that point to productive avenues for future inquiry.

Looking forward, the findings suggest several implications for research, practice and policy. Future studies could examine how Drummistic principles influence performer interpretation, audience reception and cross-cultural collaboration. There is also scope for exploring how Drummistic pedagogy can be integrated into music curricula to support Sustainable Development Goal 4 on culturally responsive education. At a broader level, the study indicates that rhythmic decolonisation offers a viable pathway for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, aligning with SDG 11. By demonstrating how indigenous rhythmic consciousness can be embedded meaningfully into Western instruments, this research opens new directions for African art music scholarship and contributes to global conversations on decolonising musical knowledge.

Implications for Scholarship and Practice

The findings of this study carry significant implications for scholarship, pedagogy, composition, and cultural policy. At the scholarly level, the study advances African art music research by demonstrating that rhythmic decolonisation is not merely a conceptual aspiration but an analytically verifiable process embedded in compositional technique. This extends existing debates on African Pianism by showing that rhythm, rather than melody or harmony, is the primary site through which indigenous epistemologies can be re-centred in Western instruments. The study therefore contributes to ongoing theoretical conversations on postcolonial hybridity, epistemic agency and decolonial aesthetics, offering a model for how African rhythmic consciousness can reshape contemporary compositional discourse. It also challenges scholars to reconsider analytical frameworks that privilege Western metric logic, suggesting instead that African rhythmic systems require interpretive models grounded in indigenous temporality, speech-tone logic and ensemble interaction.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of triangulating score analysis, audio interpretation and composer testimony in African musicological research. This multimodal approach provides a richer understanding of how indigenous rhythmic consciousness is conceptualised, embodied and performed. It suggests that future research on African art music should adopt similarly integrative methods that honour the oral, embodied and communal dimensions of African musical knowledge. The findings also indicate that Western analytical categories such as metric modulation or polyrhythm may be insufficient for describing African rhythmic logic, reinforcing the need for culturally grounded analytical tools that reflect indigenous

epistemologies. This methodological shift has the potential to reshape how African music is analysed, taught and theorised within global musicology.

For pedagogical practice, the study highlights the transformative potential of Drummistic Composition as a culturally responsive teaching strategy. The findings suggest that integrating indigenous rhythmic systems into piano pedagogy can support deeper musical understanding, cultural identity formation and creative agency among learners. This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasises inclusive and culturally relevant education. The study indicates that music educators should move beyond notation-centred approaches and incorporate embodied rhythmic exploration, ensemble simulation and oral tradition into their teaching. Such practices can help students trained in Western classical traditions overcome the conceptual barriers identified in the interview data, fostering a more holistic and culturally grounded musicianship.

At the level of compositional practice, the study provides a framework for contemporary African composers seeking to embed indigenous epistemologies into Western instruments. Drummistic Composition demonstrates how rhythmic simulation, speech-tone contouring and additive time organisation can be used to reclaim cultural agency and expand the expressive possibilities of the piano. This has implications for composers working across genres, suggesting that indigenous rhythmic consciousness can serve as a generative resource for innovation rather than a stylistic embellishment. The findings also encourage composers to engage more deeply with their cultural heritage as a source of creative authority.

Finally, the study has implications for cultural policy and heritage preservation. By demonstrating how indigenous rhythmic systems can be meaningfully adapted to contemporary art music, the research supports Sustainable Development Goal 11, which emphasises safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Drummistic Composition offers a model for how traditional knowledge can be preserved, revitalised, and transmitted through modern artistic practice. This suggests that cultural institutions, curriculum developers and arts councils should support initiatives that integrate indigenous musical epistemologies into formal education, performance programming and creative industries. Such efforts can strengthen cultural continuity, promote epistemic justice and enhance the global visibility of African musical heritage.

Collectively, these implications show that Drummistic Composition is not only a compositional technique but a framework for reimagining African art music scholarship, pedagogy and cultural policy. It offers a pathway for embedding indigenous knowledge systems into contemporary practice, advancing both academic discourse and cultural sustainability.

Conclusion

This study examined how Drummistic Composition embeds indigenous rhythmic consciousness within Western pianistic practice and addressed the broader problem of how African epistemologies can be meaningfully integrated into contemporary art music. Through a triangulated analysis of musical scores, audio interpretations and composer testimony, the study

demonstrated with empirical clarity that Drummistic Composition operationalises rhythmic decolonisation by simulating Igbo ensemble logic, speech tone contouring and additive rhythmic structures on the piano.

The study accomplished its purpose by providing a rigorous account of how Drummistic techniques embed cultural knowledge in pianistic writing and by clarifying their theoretical, methodological and pedagogical significance. Its key contributions include advancing decolonial musicological theory by showing that rhythm is a primary site of epistemic reclamation, establishing a multimodal analytical approach that integrates notation, performance and oral testimony, and offering empirical evidence that Drummistic Composition redefines pianistic identity within African art music. The overarching insight is that rhythmic decolonisation is structurally embedded and culturally intentional, enabling the piano to function as a medium of indigenous knowledge transmission.

The significance of this work lies in its ability to connect theoretical debates on hybridity, epistemic agency, and decolonial aesthetics with concrete analytical evidence, thereby filling a long-standing gap in scholarship on African Pianism and rhythmic decolonisation. The findings indicate that Drummistic Composition can inform culturally responsive pedagogy, support curriculum reform aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, and contribute to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in line with Sustainable Development Goal 11. They also suggest that contemporary African composers can draw on indigenous rhythmic consciousness as a foundation for innovation in art music, including future developments in ensemble writing, orchestration, and cross-cultural collaboration.

Future research should investigate how performers interpret Drummistic textures in live contexts, particularly how embodied rhythmic understanding shapes interpretive choices. Comparative studies across other Nigerian and African rhythmic cultures would clarify the adaptability and limits of Drummistic principles beyond Igbo traditions. Further inquiry into how students trained in Western classical systems internalise indigenous rhythmic logic would deepen understanding of the pedagogical challenges identified in this study and support the development of culturally grounded curricula.

In sum, this research demonstrates that Drummistic Composition offers a viable pathway for embedding indigenous epistemologies into contemporary art music, advancing both scholarly discourse and cultural sustainability. It affirms that Nigeria's modern art music is not merely an artistic evolution but a dynamic site of cultural reimagination.

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